

# Quality of Life

## Parks and Recreation

Norwich Park is a community focus point and gateway to the neighborhood. Norwich Park is an 11-acre community park which has a basketball court and athletic fields with lights. There is a 5,610 square foot recreation center. Built in 1968, recent improvements include new bleachers, and a new lighting system designed to light numerous sporting events.



*Norwich Park is an excellent community gateway.*

Norwich is classified as a neighborhood park, which serves the immediate area (within ¼ mile). The residents have expressed that there is a need for additional parking at the park because of the heavy attendance during softball games. Most people park in front of the rail fence that parallels the park along Roanoke Avenue. They have also requested that a separate play area for small children be established on the site.

## Environment

Another identifying trait associated with the historic community of Norwich is its geographic flatness. Known as the Bottoms, it is aptly named because it was built upon the low-lying flood plain of the Roanoke River, and appears to be down in a bowl. This feature is a source of pride for its residents, who relish its early history along the river, its industrial development, and the close ties that have developed with its long-time residents.



*The Roanoke River holds many possibilities for recreational purposes.*

The vacant land around the river is zoned Heavy Manufacturing. Many residents expressed that developing the river for recreational use with better accessibility is a high priority.

Because of Norwich's proximity to the Roanoke River, a majority of its industrial and residential areas are in the 100-year flood plain. Storm drainage and flooding remain a constant threat in most areas.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Roanoke River Flood Reduction Project will widen the entire 10-mile length of the Roanoke River within the city limits. In Norwich, the project will

widen the south bank of the Roanoke River downstream from Bridge Street. The project will include a 12 foot-wide greenway trail located along the south bank through Norwich. The result of the bank widening (bench cut) will be that the 100-year storm will allegedly be lowered by almost three feet in this area; thereby removing many houses from the flood plain. The projected start of construction for this area is at least three to four years away, and is expected to be completed by 2007. Because this is a federally-funded project, archaeological investigations should begin along the river before the start of construction.

## Neighborhood Pride

The late Pat Toney was a guiding force in establishing the Norwich Neighborhood Alliance in 1996, to "improve, enhance, redevelop, upgrade, and promote Norwich." Serving as its first president, she initiated the renovations to Norwich Park. As a member of the Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership, the alliance focuses mainly on the core area of Norwich running along Roanoke Avenue from Memorial Avenue to Irvine Street, and from the Roanoke River to Mountain View Terrace. The organization meets monthly, publishes a quarterly newsletter, and conducts an annual fall festival. One of its future goals is to work more closely with youth activities centered around the recreation center.

Many of the residents of Norwich have lived there all their lives and are third to fifth generations. During the neighborhood meetings with city staff, they were anxious to share their stories. Delmer and Shelby Jean (Clements) Weeks, of Charlevoix Court, provided some historical glimpses of the neighborhood from the 1930s through the 1950s. Married for 44 years, the Weeks are third-generation 'Norweigans.' Typical of Norwich, Shelby's father worked at the Norwich Mill before it closed, and then another 43 years at the Walker Foundry. Shelby was one of 11 children and still lives in the same house that she grew up in.



*Third-generation  
'Norweigans,' Delmer and  
Shelby Weeks*

The Weeks' talked about the safety and comfort of growing up in a small neighborhood using an example of Henry Lights' "Club House," a small two-room frame building that was built around 1933 as a "hang-out" for the neighborhood kids and a place where soap-box cars were built. The clubhouse was located where the Quonset hut now stands at Norwich Park.

They recalled when the city park was the city dump and when the underground spring flowed from the hillside above Buford Avenue. The spring was the original source of water for the community and featured a well house with a stuccoed arch

and windmill. Shelby and Delmer used to gather water from the well for their families and remember it fondly as the best water they had ever tasted. Later industrial development along Buford Avenue apparently closed down the well. The only school was the Norwich School, which only had grades one through four. However, most residents never graduated from high school, and most had to go to work or help with ailing families. No one ever visited the hospital or even a doctor, as it was not affordable, and most babies were born at home. Most residents relied on home remedies, but if a doctor was ever needed, he was called from Melrose Avenue where he lived. Entertainment was simple. Delmer remembers being able to go to the movies with 50 cents in his pocket on the streetcar from Roanoke Avenue (which turned around at the end of the street) down Memorial Avenue and into downtown Roanoke, enjoying the movie with popcorn, and returning home on the streetcar with change in his pocket! The Twine Mill sponsored local boxing, and there was great excitement when the circus once came to Norwich.